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House of Commons Debates.

FIFTH SESSION—EIGHTH PARLIAMENT.

SPEECH

OF

NICHOLAS FLOOD DAVIN, M.P.

ON THE

REVIEW OF THE FINANCIAL SITUATION

OTTAWA, TUESDAY, JULY 10, 1900

Mr. NICHOLAS FLOOD DAVIN (West Assinibola). A number of things, Mr. Speaker, have been omitted in this debate that I do not think it would be fit to leave untouched in so important a crisis in our parliamentary history. It is perfectly clear from the speech we have just listened to, that we are on the eve of a general election, and therefore, we are looking back over five sessions and four years and a month of the administration of the present government.

The hon. gentleman who is leading the opposition (Mr. Foster) in a brilliant, cogent, convincing speech, went over a number of items, a number of great questions and great administrative transactions on which this government stands convicted before the country. The hon. gentleman spoke of the dealings of the Minister of Public Works with Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Robillard, and he referred inferentially to the dealings with regard to the Edmonton bridge and a number of other matters that have disgraced the conduct of the Public Works Department.

He referred to the Railway Department, which at this moment is regarded as a pear that has the yellows, by the people of Canada. He referred to that department, the administration of which, now, that we are closing these four years, the people are beginning to understand, and with regard to which a frightful revelation has been made in another place.

He referred especially and particularly to the \$425 per day for the dredging of the Galops Rapids, in regard to which not one word has been said by the hon. the Minister of Finance. Why? No doubt because not one could be said. The hon. gentleman was here the other night when we wanted information from the Minister of Railways. Could we get any information or any explanation? We could get nothing from him but what I regret to have to describe as what we should not expect from a minister of the Crown. What we should expect from a minister of the Crown is candour, confidence in parliament, ingenuousness and readiness to give information. You would not expect from him the insolence of an illiterate and dragged up person. I do not say that the hon. gentleman is such a person, but I say that I never saw a nearer approach to vulgar insolence than we got from the hon. gentleman when we wanted to know what was the meaning of this tremendous charge of \$425 per day for a dredge. Not one word was said about that incident by the hon. the Minister of Finance. Not one word did he say about the oil contract or about that change of contract by the Minister of Railways, which places him in the same category as the emergency food business has placed the Minister of Militia. Where that has placed the Minister of Militia is understood by the people of Canada, and all the glowing words of the hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat

and given such a nice little defence, cannot relieve his colleague, the Minister of Militia, from the charge that is in the people's minds against him as the head of that department. Either one of two things—either he is an imbecile or he is corrupt.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. That is not in order.

Mr. DAVIN. If that is out of order, I withdraw it. The hon. gentleman will see that I put it alternatively, and if I wished to argue the point, I think I could show that I was not out of order, but I withdraw it at once, because I have no desire to be out of order. I will say this for the Minister of Finance. There is one thing great about him, and that is his audacity. He commenced by saying that the present government is in no way responsible for the delays that have taken place this session. He said that there was not a day when the government was not ready with business, and tried to throw the blame on the opposition. Why, it was the 23rd March before the hon. gentleman brought down his budget. Parliament opened the 1st February, and it was the 23rd March before the hon. gentleman gave us his budget. And what is the business of the country? It is to discuss the budget, the estimates, the supplies. What happened subsequently? We had a fire in Hull. On the day of that fire, we met here to do business, but the right hon. the Prime Minister got up and with an ingenuousness on which I cannot compliment him, he said: We will not have any more light for some days, and had better adjourn, and on his motion we adjourned until the following Tuesday. There was no reason for the adjournment because there was plenty of light, except the reason that the government had no business to go on with. Yet the Minister of Finance has the effrontery to stand up here and say that the government was always ready. Then who does not remember the junior member of Halifax moving an amendment on the preferential trade on the motion to go into Committee of Supply?

Is the hon. gentleman aware of the record of the Liberal party with regard to railway subsidies? Unable to defend himself he has recourse to the plea that there had been some slight difference in the way the Liberal party has dealt with subsidies as compared with that of the previous government. I leave that to the public to judge.

Then we have the hon. gentleman's defence of the McKenzie & Mann contract. Did he defend it on its merits or say it was a good contract? Did he say it showed the heaven born genius of the young Napoleon or the wise genius that presides over the council chamber of seventeen heaven-born ministers? Not at all. All he said was that it was sanctioned by Sir Charles Tupper, so that all that the Minister of Finance has to

say of this scheme that was universally condemned by the people, that was thrown out by the Senate, and that the government never dared to revive—all that he has to say is that it was approved by Sir Charles Tupper. But, as a fact, it was never approved. The defence the hon. gentleman makes has not a single inch of ground to stand upon and I will tell you why. Sir Charles Tupper was in Montreal when the contract with Mackenzie & Mann was announced, and saw the newspaper paragraphs with regard to it as he was coming upon the train; and when he got to Ottawa he gave an interview to a reporter. He endorsed the general scheme, but not one word did he say as to the merits of the transaction. So, the defence of the Minister of Finance falls to the ground.

Now, we come to the tariff. And we need not be surprised that the hon. gentleman made no defence on that subject. He said: We are accused of only making small changes in the tariff. Well, he could not say they had made great changes, although he had on his right his leader—that leader who had declared that if he got into power he would take a sponge and wipe away protection; that leader who went from end to end of Canada declaring that the Upas tree of protection should be pulled up; that leader who came to Manitoba and the North-west Territories and who in Regina and Moosejaw declared that the farmers should be relieved of the oppression of the protective system; that leader who with his prospective Minister of Agriculture at his side allowed that hon. gentleman to declare that the 20 per cent duty on implements was oppression, thereby declaring, by implication, that if they got into power, that duty would be done away with; that leader who afterwards took the hon. member for Brandon (Mr. Sifton) into his cabinet, a gentleman who had run the campaign for Dalton McCarthy as well as for himself on the cry of 'free implements.' And yet they have been in power five sessions and there is still a 20 per cent duty on implements; and the cheaper cottons are taxed higher than ever; and coal oil is dearer than ever, and no relief for the consumer. The Finance Minister knew all these things. He was like a man skating on thin ice; he glided over the traffic as quickly as he could. As to the tariff, there is not a man, but especially the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior, and the Minister of Agriculture—there is not a man belonging to the old leaders of the Liberal party in parliament here that does not stand before Canada forsworn—their lips are blistered with their perjury to the people of Canada. No wonder the Minister of Finance glides away from the tariff question.

What is his defence on the emergency ration? Why, he did not see the point. The point is that you have a Minister of Militia closeting himself with a

contractor, receiving from him a tender and giving him a contract, the whole thing done in this sleight-of-hand manner. And you have not merely broken biscuits in paint cans sent to our soldiers—that is not the gravamen of the charge; but the gravamen of the charge is, as a Liberal speaking behind them said, it smells of something that we must not name in this chamber at least in connection with the name of any hon. member; but it is named and will be shouted throughout Canada. The gravamen is that it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that somebody in that Department of Militia was conspiring with Devlin. Who he is I am not going to say. And how does the hon. gentleman (Mr. Fielding) defend it? Why, he says, it was only the small sum—\$4,000. As if this would make any difference, if it were only forty cents—if there was fraud and villainy and infamy beneath it. But the minister (Mr. Fielding) glides off and says that something similar took place under Conservative rule. Is that any defence? The leader of the opposition (Mr. Foster) traversed what he said. Is this the kind of government we have—that they cannot defend a single charge except by saying that somebody else did something as bad? You call me a thief, and I say you have purloined a pocket handkerchief. You say my virtue is not what it should be, and I ask you if you are chaste? It is talk only heard in the unnamable purloins of great cities. You see two people with arms akimbo and jaw to jaw howling, 'you're another, you're another.'

When the hon. gentleman came to the expenditure, there was the gliding on thin ice. I suppose he learned to slide in Halifax. I should like to see him on skates. Here is a government whose members, in a hall within earshot of this chamber, declared that if they were returned to power they would reduce the expenditure and reduce the public debt, both of which they characterized as fearful. But after four years we find that they have increased both. And what is their defence? 'We have not increased them as much as you did.' Why, this is the language—I suppose I may name the hon. gentleman as he is now in Paris—this is the language of Tarte. As he says: 'We have spent much, but we have made much.' 'We.' It is not the ploughman in the field, it is not the mechanic in the shop, it is not the merchant, it is not the toiler, who have made Canada prosperous but 'we,' sitting in 'our' offices or making 'our' little speeches in parliament. Why, Sir, the expenditure, as the hon. member for York (Mr. Foster) has shown, has gone up to a frightful extent. But the answer is: If you will look at it closely, it will not look quite so bad, because the country is prosperous and can bear it. This is the language of a young spendthrift who has come in for a great fortune. He has promised his father that he will

economize and will look carefully after the estate. But after four years the father finds that he has been indulging in the most licentious extravagance; and when spoken to about it the young spendthrift says: Is it not my own? Have I not a fine income and a great estate? He has both, though he did not do anything to create them. Hon. gentlemen opposite came into a great estate, I grant you, an estate that had been managed for eighteen years with consummate skill, with such skill as to lay foundation for expansion to the present proportions. But, coming into that estate, they say: It is we who have made it all. The Prime Minister points to the great canals sweeping through the vast domain, canals that have been deepened by his predecessors and says: Is it not magnificent? I did it all. But one who hears that begins to think: Well this man has only been on the estate for four years; and I think I have heard about one John A who used to be here; and I think I have seen these canals deepened years ago. But no, the Prime Minister says: I did it all; I made all this prosperity. The argument of the hon. gentleman (Mr. Fielding) with regard to the expenditure is worth noting carefully. He says, with regard to the expenditure that that expenditure is not so bad, because it has been kept within the receipts. Has he done that? Why, Sir, one of the ways that it appears to be kept within receipts, is this, that you are charging to capital account things that should never be charged to capital. The Minister of Railways and Canals the other night had to reduce, at the bidding of my hon. friend, one item by \$7,000. The hon. gentleman saw it was improper. Among those items, we had \$5,000 for a snow fence charged to capital. If we could only get a glimpse at that snow fence, we should see still more clearly that it is a scandal to book-keeping to charge a snow-fence to capital. But in that snow fence there is a nigger. He has a rubicund face—I will go no further.

Now, Sir, the hon. gentleman, in claiming credit for the extension of income, forgot to say that the price of every commodity has gone up. You are under a complete delusion. You are deceiving the people unconsciously, when you say there have been much larger purchases than in years past. The fact is that the price of everything has so gone up that these gentlemen are collecting tolls on that advanced price, and they are working the whole out of the expenditure of the country. Then the hon. gentleman felt uneasy about economy, he felt the dart of the leader of the opposition sticking under his fifth rib. What was his defence? What was the final defence made by these hon. gentlemen the last time they will sit on those Treasury benches for many a year? What is their defence for not having brought about the economy they promised? Why, Sir, they read a speech of Sir Charles Tup-

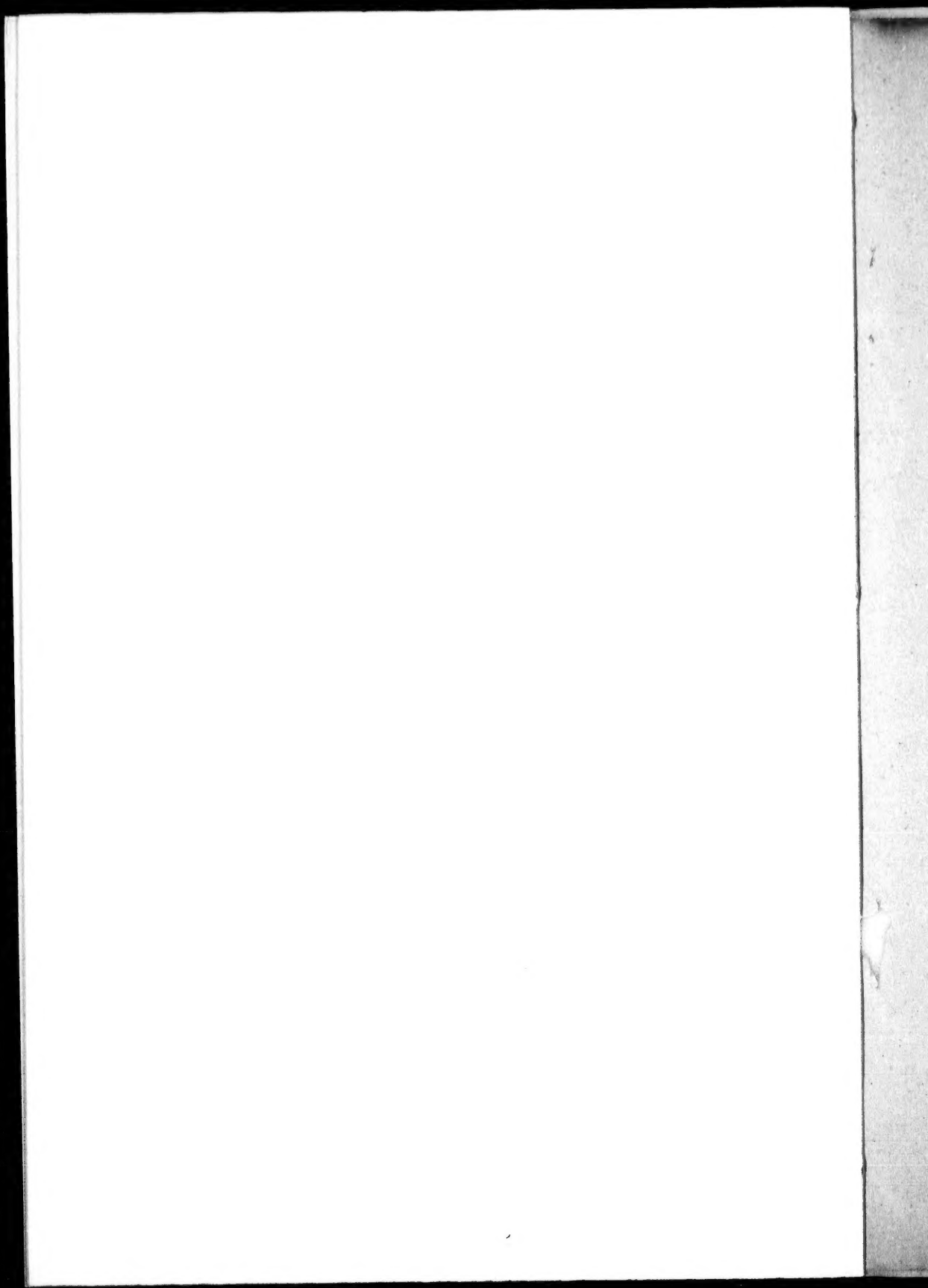
per made in 1878. Sir Charles Tupper said in 1878, that they would be more economical than Mr. Mackenzie, and were they not? Did the hon. gentleman prove that the Conservative government did not carry out his promise to be more economical? When he said he would be more economical, he meant that the incompetence and maladministration that had characterized the Mackenzie government, would not characterize his administration, and that he would on the lines of administration of Mr. Mackenzie be more economical than he; and if you make a comparison of the two administrations you will find that that promise was carried out. And the hon. gentleman to-night points to the expenditure in 1881-2, in order to show the vast extravagance of the present government was not so bad after all. When, in 1879, the Conservative administration came into power, a new sense of life rushed through the veins of the country. Great schemes were put forward. At that time the government of Sir John A. Macdonald had entered upon the greatest work that any people of ten millions or twenty millions had ever entered upon, that of building the greatest railway in the world, a work which put back-bone and body, breadth, as well as length, into Canada. The government of Sir John A. Macdonald entered upon a career of great public works, and yet the hon. gentleman puts his hands on his heart, and says: It is I who built all these canals. There they are, false to every promise, false to the promise of tariff reduction, false to the promises of economy, and then, strutting about like a jackdaw in peacock's plumes, saying that the achievements of better men who preceded them, are their achievements. It is by such means that they hope to capture the people. Sir, the people know them from the Prime Minister to the Minister of the Interior, from the Minister of the Interior to the Minister of Public Works, from the Minister of Public Works to the Minister of Railways and Canals. Why, there is not a man of them who is not convicted before the people of Canada to-day. And yet the minister says: We are going before the people, we will be accepted and returned again. Yes, returned again. Do they indeed suppose the people at this hour, are capable of being humbugged to the extent they think they can humbug them? The policy of this government on which it got in, and on which it is living to this hour, can be described in just one word: Humbug, humbug, humbug. I was surprised to read the other day in the *Gazette* of 1877, that a constituent of the right hon. gentleman, had at that period actually done what it took some of us a couple of years to do. A constituent of his wrote a letter to the *Gazette* quoting a speech that the hon. gentleman made when he thought that only French ears were listening to him. He was talking about the tax on tea, and he said: The tax only affects Irishmen, because Irishmen only are fond of tea, pota-

toes and whisky. The writer of this letter is an Irishman who resented this insult to Irishmen. And he then states that he had heard the hon. gentlemen in different parts of his constituency, and that his habit was to say one thing on one platform, and another thing on another. We know that is his habit. But, Sir, 'in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird.' The people of this great community have been taken once, but now the net has been spread so palpably that the game cannot work any longer. The right hon. gentleman came up west and spoke in his calm, nice way and charming manner, and the people took him at his word and they said: He is going to give us what he promised at Moosejaw, lower freight rates, free implements, cheap coal oil; he is going to give us complete enfranchisement. Now, they believe that if they gave him power again, he would not touch one of the things he promised, no not with his little finger.

Now, Sir, need we be surprised that under these circumstances we find yourself, Mr. Speaker, and other hon. members of this House refusing, some of them refusing out of fear and some of them because they will not face the people under the weight of the odium, under the crushing weight of broken pledges and falsified promises that any man who shoulders the task of running as a candidate of the right hon. gentleman has to face and to bear—refusing to again offer themselves for re-election to this House. Where are they going? They cannot be elected. I have been in some of the constituencies. I have attended some picnics in the west, I have made some speeches, and the people of the country, if I may use a vulgar expression, are on to them and on to them all.

The hon. gentleman glided very rapidly over very thin, thin ice. He did not dare to touch Gauthier, my son's father-in-law, or Robillard. The charming way that Robillard gets a note from the secretary of the department: Please tender! You remember the connection by marriage with one of the sons or daughters, I do not know which it is, of the hon. Minister of Public Works. Please tender; and then Robillard tenders. Robillard is more wide awake than Gauthier, and what does he do? Now, Mr. Speaker, I commend this to your consideration. Robillard antedates his application so as to make it appear that it preceded the invitation to tender. But, he forgot, when sending it, with that guileless innocent of an Israelite indeed, to tell the clerk in the Public Works Department not to stamp the letter, because it is the custom when a letter comes into the department to stamp the date upon which it arrives, and we have that guileless letter of Robillard dated after the invitation to tender was given. Then Gauthier, I believe, is a quill driver. Fancy Gauthier advancing to dredge the rapids with his quill in his hand! When the hon. leader of the oppo-

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sition (Mr. Foster) or myself asked the hon. Minister of Public Works: 'Who is Gauthier? Is he a relative of yours?' 'No,' in his rather bluff, emphatic way, 'He is no relative of mine.' 'Is he your son's father-in-law?' and then the heroic manner in which the hon. Minister of Public Works said: 'How can I help it if my sons do have fathers-in-law?'

The hon. gentleman glided over the cement business and he never said a word about \$425 for a dredge. We want to know what kind of a dredge it was? Four hundred and twenty-five dollars a day! I was speaking to a man, not very far from a minister of the Crown, and he could not understand how any dredge would cost \$425 a day. Eight dollars an hour is a good price for a dredge or \$80 a day. Eight dollars an hour is what Gauthier gets, I believe. He gives \$5 and sits there in his office, writing away with his quill; the dredging is being done and he takes \$3 an hour. Is it not a nice thing to be the father-in-law of the son of a minister? It is one of the best assets in Canada to-day to be a relation of one of the ministers. I think we have heard of a relation of a minister who had a sleeping interest in a railway contract. And, we had the young Napoleon. I do not know whether the hon. leader of the opposition said anything about Burrows. These marital relations are so embarrassing to the government. One is the father-in-law of the son of a minister, another is the mother-in-law and Burrows is the brother-in-law of the hon. Minister of the Interior. I exposed how Burrows got an opportunity away from all competitors, without fulfilling the conditions of an order in council, passed to enable him to get hold of these timber limits, and how he was enabled to make \$25,000 at a snap. These relationships are a great thing. Then, my hon. friend gave us a proverb. This government is strong on many things. It is strong on tu quoque, but it is especially strong on proverbs. It commenced its career with 'Business is business,' enunciated by the hon. Minister of Public Works, and now we have the hon. Minister of Finance telling us that he is a great admirer of what is written up in the west, 'Wise expenditure is true economy.' The Galena oil deal, the Crow's Nest deal, the Drummond County, the Galops Rapids, the Edmonton Bridge, the Mann-Mackenzie deal, and in face of these we have the proverb, 'Wise expenditure is true economy.' Then we have last, but not least, the emergency ration business. It is only \$4,000; what signifies it? It is not \$4,000 that the people are caring about. We had better have it dragged out into the light at once because we know we have a man at the head of the Militia Department whose character ought to drive him from that position. We know that the Prime

Minister knows it because I know that the facts are in the possession of the Prime Minister, and it is scandalous cowardice on our part that we will not drag into light the infamous use that is made of the authority of a minister who uses his ministerial power to gratify the errant impulses of a corrupt nature. There are transactions known to the Prime Minister in regard to that man that should have prevented the Prime Minister from placing him in a position where he would have the opportunity of gratifying his greed, to put it mildly. I say it is scandalous, and if the Prime Minister had had a proper sense of what is due to himself and due to the people of Canada the hon. Minister of Militia would not have been in his present place, and we should have been spared these developments in regard to Devlin which are as disgraceful to Canada as they are dangerous to our young men.

Then the Minister of Finance said that the aggregate taxation was a proof of prosperity, and that the country was merely keeping pace with it. Increased expenditure; increased income; and he harped upon that. The thing is so utterly baseless, that the strongest admirer of the Prime Minister in Canada, the gentleman who writes in the *Sun*, has had to abandon a defence in regard to these matters and to come out and say that there can be no defence for it. It is all very well to see these ministers in the second and third year of their term, coming to the House with their shoulders swaggering as we have seen them, coming in feeling that their pockets are well lined, and that they are in power and can drive about in their carriages; that is all very fine, but now when they are about to go before the people of Canada and to render an account there is an unwonted pallor and an unused humility in their demeanour. What was the minister's (Mr. Fielding's) defence about the Yukon. He said: I have just got the figures from the Minister of the Interior, and for three years, 1897-8, 1898-9, and into 1900, the receipts were \$3,869,000, and the expenditure \$3,215,000. That would make a surplus of \$653,000, or for the three and a half years \$187,000 a year. That is the profit from a Golconda; that is the profit out of the cream skimming of the richest gold-bearing land in the world. Why, Sir, if the Minister of the Interior had managed that territory in the interests of Canada and not in the interests of Wade and McGregor and his pals, instead of having \$187,000 a year we should have had a million in the coffers of Canada. Did the Minister of Finance try to show there was no mismanagement? Not at all. His duty was to have defended the sending of the militia there which is perfectly indefensible, and to have defended the numberless mal-administrations on the part of the minister (Mr. Sifton), but all he did was to say there

was \$187,000 a year profit out of the richest gold-bearing lands on the face of the globe. It is a scandalous record, and there is no part of the somewhat bold defence of the Minister of Finance bolder than that.

Then, we had his peroration: Four years of good government; four years of clean government. Clean government! Why, Mr. Speaker:

Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks; The bauby wind that kisses all it meets Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth, And will not hear it.

Clean government, forsooth. Corrupt government, a government so corrupt that it is putrid now. The Minister of Finance said: Look at us. We had a bath this morning; our face is washed; we have a paper collar and a new tie, and a white shirt that we got done in the Chinese laundry; see how spick and span we are. Yes, Mr. Speaker, look closely at them. Why, Sir, you cannot go near them without having evidence to more than one sense that there has the foulest of all diseases crept into that government. You cannot talk with a man on the street car but he tells you—sometimes a Liberal, and sometimes a Conservative—that the moment this government appeals to the people, they will be swept away by the indignation of the electors at their misconduct. I grant you that from a popular government or from the administration of any government, you cannot wholly keep away much that you would like to. Corruption will steal in. But it is a form of corruption that may leave ministers comparatively pure. Under pressure of politics, sometimes more men may be employed or something of that sort, but what we see in the present government is that into every part of the House, into their parlour, into their study, and into the holy of holies, so to speak, of the internal management of the government things that we do not like to speak of have crept. You cannot think of the Department of the Interior, with its Wades, its McGregors, its McCrearys, its deals—and all more or less connected with the minister—until that minister is so discredited, that when the Minister of Finance, yesterday or the day before tried to get up a cheer for him, and the hon. member for Grey (Mr. Landerkin) to-day, they could only just clap their two miserable hands together. There was not an echo from another member. And when the minister (Mr. Sifton) rose to speak after being four months away, presumably ill, allegedly ill, and when the party should have some tenderness for him, when he rose in his place twice to vote, there was not a cheer. An attempt to cheer from the ministerial benches ended miserably as I have described. It was vain to try and get one up, and those who did had to clap their two miserable palms together in vain.

Let me say here in regard to the Minister of the Interior. We may discuss

it. He has come back, and I am sorry to say that he is not a bit improved. I know what his disease is, and I honestly regret to say that it is incurable. The technical name for it is non-purulent otitis media catarrhalis. In ordinary language it is called dry catarrh of the middle ear. It is incurable. It may go on as it is for years and years, and the hearing remain about the same, but every aurist knows it is impossible to make it better. One of the best aurists in the world is Dr. Buller, of Montreal, and yet we read of the Minister of the Interior going here and going there, speaking in London and speaking in Paris, when he could have consulted the very best professional advice at home. What was to prevent him coming across to Canada? It is only a nine days trip. What was to prevent him coming across the ocean and spending a night with us, and giving us some explanation, and going with us to one of the committees. No, Sir; he never spread his wings for Canada until the rumour came that this House was about to close. Take Mr. Tarte. Nobody need have any tenderness in speaking of his health. The man who can go about making speeches from one part of the continent to the other (and making such speeches) nobody thinks for one moment that it is illness that keeps Mr. Tarte away. The reason why both these gentlemen have kept away from this House was to prevent us doing what we would have done if they were here, namely, arranging them as you could not arraign them in their absence. That is the reason they remained away.

Take the conduct of the Minister of Public Works. Take his carpet scandal, take the scandal of the fence around the park. Take the scandal of the Edmonton bridge. Why, Sir, I said in regard to that bridge, and I repeat it, that I put the handcuffs on his wrists in such a manner that no power under heaven can take them off. Mr. Tarte will stand for ever before the people of Canada with regard to that Edmonton bridge, with the handcuffs on his wrists, because the facts as shown by the documents to be found in his own department, bring guilt home to him.

These things being so, fancy the boldness of the hon. gentleman. I said the other day that if my friend the member for North Wellington (Mr. McMullen) were dissected, I would like to get his gall. But what would the gall of the member for North Wellington be to the gall of the hon. gentleman who has just defended his government? He told us a story about some young lady and about marriage. It was a nice little story and very appropriate. I suppose I may tell a little story that will apply to this government when they go with their sunny ways and offer the boy Canada an orange, and he refuses, as I think he will to take the orange, or to be taken in by the smile; and the reason will be illustrated by this story. There was a doctor who used to give

sweets and candies and oranges to a little boy. One day he gave the boy an orange, and afterwards, to see how the boy would take it, he hid himself and threw aside a curtain which concealed a skeleton such as doctors sometimes have. The boy ran away frightened. The next day the boy was at the other side of the street, and the doctor said, 'Come, won't you have an orange to-day?' 'No, no,' said the boy, 'I will have no more oranges of yours; you know

I saw you naked yesterday.' When the hon. gentleman goes with his sunny ways and offers the boy Canada taffy and oranges, if his taffy and his sunny smiles do not have the same reception as they used to have, and the boy Canada gives him the cold shoulder and a wide berth, let him remember that the boy has now seen him naked. The skeleton of the Liberal party is before the people of Canada, and the sunny ways and the taffy will avail no more.